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History of the Naukan Yupik Eskimo dictionary with implications for a future Siberian Yupik dictionary

Steven A. Jacobson*

Résumé: Histoire du dictionnaire Naukan Yupik Eskimo et ses implications pour un futur dictionnaire du Yupik sibérien

Naukan est une langue Yupik qui n'est parlée de nos jours que par quelques personnes du côté russe du détroit de Béring, qui ont toutefois de fortes affinités alaskiennes. Dobrieva de Lavrentiya, qui parle naukan, le linguiste Golovko de St Petersburg et les linguistes Krauss et Jacobson de Fairbanks ont compilé un dictionnaire naukan en deux volumes parallèles: naukan-anglais avec le naukan orthographié en lettres latines et, naukan-russe avec le naukan transcrit dans l'alphabet cyrillique modifié que l'on utilise pour les langues eskimo de Tchoukotka. L'implication dans ce projet de gens de l'Alaska, de l'Europe russe et de la Tchoukotka était à la fois appropriée et bénéfique. Le dictionnaire a été publié récemment par le Centre des langues Autochtones d'Alaska de l'Université d'Alaska à Fairbanks. Le dictionnaire naukan en deux volumes parallèles peut servir de modèle pour produire un nouveau dictionnaire du yupik (central) sibérien, une langue parlée, au moins ancestralement, par à peu près autant de gens sur l'île Saint-Laurent en Alaska que dans la région de Novo Chaplino-Sirenik en Tchoukotka russe. Un tel dictionnaire pourrait aider à revigorer cette langue et lui permettre de mieux servir de pont entre les deux moitiés d'un même peuple et d'une même culture, divisés seulement depuis quelques décennies par une frontière qu'ils n'ont pas créée.

Abstract: History of the Naukan Yupik Eskimo dictionary with implications for a future dictionary of Siberian Yupik

Naukan is a Yupik Eskimo language spoken now by only a few people on the Russian side of the Bering Strait, but with strong Alaskan affinities. Naukan speaker Dobrieva of Lavrentiya, linguist Golovko of St. Petersburg, and linguists Jacobson and Krauss of Fairbanks have compiled a Naukan dictionary in two parallel volumes: Naukan in a latin-letter orthography to English, and Naukan in the modified Cyrillic alphabet used for Chukotkan Eskimo languages to Russian. It was both appropriate and beneficial that this project involved people from Alaska, European Russia, and Chukotka. The dictionary was recently published by the Alaska Native Language Center of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The Naukan dictionary in two parallel volumes can serve as a model for a new dictionary of (Central) Siberian Yupik, a language spoken, at least ancestrally, by roughly equal numbers on St. Lawrence Island Alaska and in the New Chaplino-Sirenik area of Chukotka, Russia. Such a dictionary could help to reinvigorate that language and allow it better to serve as a bridge between the two halves of a single people and culture divided only in recent decades by a boundary not of their own making.

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The Naukan language, its geographic and linguistic position

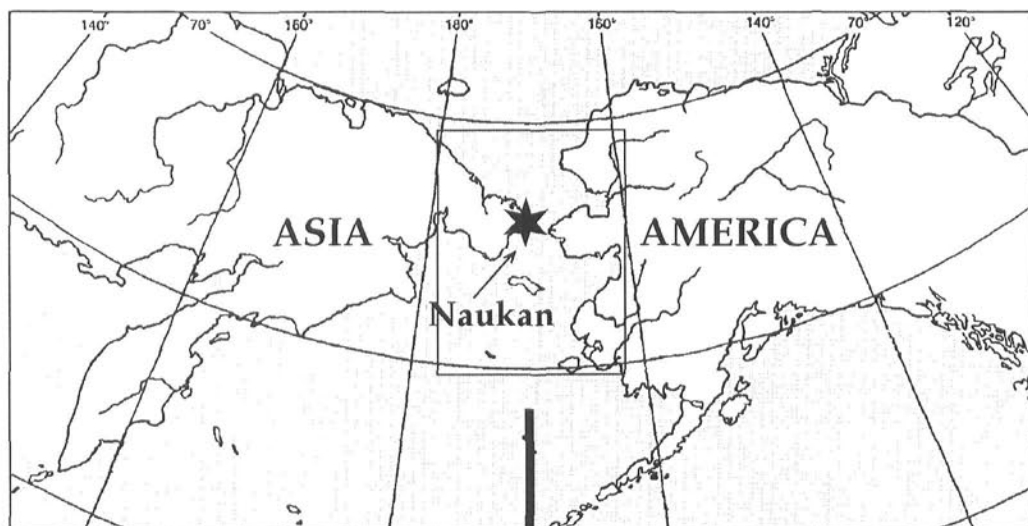
Naukan Yupik Eskimo is the language of no more than 50 speakers living mostly in Lavrentiya in Siberia but whose original home is the village of Naukan at East Cape, Siberia (Figure 1)¹. Despite the small size of the Naukan group, the lexicon of this language was first documented quite early, as western Eskimo languages go, one word in 1732, and a whole list of 277 words in Robeck (1791) (Figure 2). We shall not go into the history of the early documentation of the language here as that is well covered in Michael Krauss's introduction to the Naukan dictionary recently published by the Alaska Native Language Center (ANLC) of the University of Alaska Fairbanks (see Dobrieva *et al.* 2004). Instead, we shall summarize the history of the new Naukan dictionary itself, and discuss how it is that a dictionary of a language spoken only in Siberia could be composed and written mostly in Alaska, by an international group of compilers: a native Naukan speaker from Lavrentiya, a Russian linguist from St. Petersburg, and two American linguists from Fairbanks.

Though spoken only in Siberia, Naukan is linguistically intermediate between two languages that are spoken in Alaska: (Central) Siberian Yupik Eskimo, the language of St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, and of the area of the Siberian coast directly to the west, and Central (Alaskan) Yup'ik Eskimo, spoken in southwestern Alaska only. The reason that Naukan—quite a distance to the north of both Central Yup'ik and Siberian Yupik—is intermediate is that the connection between Siberian Yupik and Central Alaskan Yup'ik undoubtedly went in a northern arc through East Cape, across the Bering Strait and the Seward Peninsula, not, as one might first think, directly across the open ocean between St. Lawrence Island and the southwestern Alaskan coast, which might be an area with no land barrier, but with quite a substantial sea barrier, not aboriginally navigable. Whether Naukan is linguistically closer to Siberian Yupik or to Central Alaskan Yup'ik, or is a third branch precisely midway between the two, and whether Naukan is at heart a Siberian language or an Alaskan language, and where exactly it arose, are questions which will be left to Krauss's introduction to the Naukan dictionary. He has marshalled some impressive evidence to place Naukan in the Alaskan camp coming to East Cape perhaps by way of King Island.

Background of the new Naukan dictionary

In 1985, Michael Krauss, with the help of Mikhail Chlenov of Moscow, established the first direct contacts between ANLC and the Naukan people, in the person of Antonina Verbitskaya. Also in 1985, when Michael Fortescue, Lawrence Kaplan and Steven Jacobson were first working on the *Comparative Eskimo Dictionary* (Fortescue *et al.* 1994), their basic source of lexical information for Naukan was the lengthy vocabulary list in Menovshchikov (1975), a work devoted to the Naukan language, supplemented by several earlier wordlists starting with Robeck (1791).

¹ "Siberia" is here meant in the common American sense extending in Russia as far east as the Bering Strait, and not in the Russian sense which stops well short of Chukotka.



**Naukan and its place
in the World**



**Naukan
and its
Neighbors**

Figure 1. Location of Naukan.

Gott	—	<i>Aghat.</i>
Vater	—	<i>Ataka.</i>
Mutter	—	<i>Anak.</i>
Sohn	—	<i>Rineka.</i>
Tochter	—	<i>Pannika.</i>
Bruder	—	<i>Anechluktik.</i>
Brudergattin	—	<i>Najachak.</i>
Mann	—	<i>Uika.</i>
Weib	—	<i>Nulliak.</i>
Mädchen	—	<i>Nubiachhchak.</i>
Junge	—	<i>Nuckälpäak.</i>

Figure 2. From the first Naukan wordlist by Robeck (1791). The column on the left is German, and on the right Naukan (a middle Chukchi column has been omitted here). For the first entry Gott (God) there is the Naukan word *aghat* (which actually means 'medicines'), for the next entry Vater (father) there is Naukan *ataka* ('my father'), then for Mutter (mother) is *aana(q)*, for Sohn (son) *ighneqa* ('my son'), for Tochter (daughter) *panika* ('my daughter'), for Bruder (brother) *anellgute(q)* ('sibling'), for Mann (husband) *uika* ('my husband'), for Weib (wife) *nuliaq*, for Mädchen (girl) *neviaghsaq*, and for Junge (lad) *nukalpiaq*. As with those shown here most, but not all, words on the list are still in use after the passage of 200 years.

Jacobson had previously devoted some attention to Naukan because it is linguistically between Central and Siberian Yupik, two languages which he had been studying.

The Teplilek-Leonova wordlist

In 1992, ANLC received a surprise present from Darlene Orr of Nome in the form of a copy of a lexical typescript for Naukan, which she had obtained from Victor Goldsbury also of Nome, a man with contacts across the Bering Strait. We mistakenly believed that the author of this work was Izabella Avtonova, and her name is given in the *Comparative Eskimo Dictionary*. Later, much to our embarrassment, we learned that it was in fact the work of Irina Teplilek-Leonova of Naukan. The work consists of 2,200 Naukan words typed in Cyrillic according to the generally adequate standard orthography used for Eskimo languages in Siberia since earlier Soviet times (see Teplilek-Leonova 1985). The words were glossed in Russian. Unfortunately, the order was not alphabetical for either Naukan or Russian, but more "stream of consciousness," that is, Teplilek-Leonova, would, for example, be listing words for various types of sewing stitches, one of which would be termed literally "thing like a thumb" because of its appearance, and then there would come words for fingers and other body parts, until one of them would lead on to another topic. Such a wordlist was not easy to use when looking for cognates for the *Comparative Eskimo Dictionary*!

To remedy this shortcoming, Jacobson entered the information into a computer database, and added English translations of the Russian glosses. With the database one could easily alphabetize the data by the English, by the Russian, or by the Naukan, which was entered both in the Cyrillic of the Teplilek-Leonova typescript, and in a latin-letter orthography. The practical orthography used on St. Lawrence Island for Siberian Yupik was chosen, as it was judged to be more adequate phonetically, and more appropriate politically and socially than the practical orthography of Central Yup'ik, notwithstanding Krauss's well-buttressed assertion that Naukan is at heart equally close to Central Yup'ik, and also ignoring the expressed feelings of at least a few Central Yup'ik speakers that the Naukans were *their* Siberian cousins just as the people of New Chaplino and Sirenik were the Siberian cousins of the St. Lawrence Islanders.

Dobrieva's work in Fairbanks and Lavrentiya

At this point Krauss insisted that the various older wordlists which he had collected for the ANLC archive and the vocabulary list from Menovshchikov (1975) should now be combined with the database made from the Teplilek-Leonova typescript, so that the result could be checked and expanded into a decent Naukan dictionary. He then arranged for a Naukan speaker, Elizaveta Dobrieva, to come over from Lavrentiya for several weeks in the summer of 1995. She was an excellent choice, very knowledgeable concerning her native Naukan language, extremely interested in the project, very perceptive about language issues in general, quite capable of finding

other speakers in the Naukan community of Lavrentiya to help her when necessary, and in all a genuine pleasure to work with.

Golovko's work in St. Petersburg, Chukotka and Fairbanks

After Dobrieva had gone home, taking lists of questions with her for further research, Krauss helped Evgeniy Golovko of St. Petersburg obtain a Fulbright fellowship. Golovko had been working on Naukan from the Russian side since 1990 and had made several field trips to Chukotka. He had introduced the ANLC group to those Naukan people who came to the Inuit Studies Conference held in Fairbanks Aug. 19-24, 1990 (Figure 3 and 4). Returning to Fairbanks in 1997 for eight months on his fellowship, Golovko worked at ANLC, entering into the database all of the lexical material from Menovshchikov (1975), plus a large amount of information from his own research with Naukan, from Emelyanova's extensive Naukan card files (Emelyanova and Golovko 1995) which are housed in St. Petersburg, and from the field notes, manuscripts and published articles of various other researchers. Golovko handled various issues of Russian language, eventually also translating into Russian the introductory material that Krauss and Jacobson had written in English.

Krauss's and Jacobson's work in Fairbanks, and Dobrieva's second stay there

After Golovko left, Jacobson entered information from the older wordlists into the database, added word derivations, proto-Eskimo or proto-Yupik references from the Comparative Eskimo Dictionary, and the sources of Chukchi and other loanwords. He also compiled a section of postbases and enclitics. Krauss worked on certain specialized areas including plant names, and most specifically Naukan placenames. Several years of funding were obtained from the Shared Beringian Heritage Program of the US National Park Service.

Dobrieva came over from Lavrentiya again in the autumn of 1999, staying in Fairbanks for over a month. Jacobson and Krauss were able to resolve many problems working with her and going over the answers she had brought back to the lists of questions she had taken back to Lavrentiya after her previous stay in Fairbanks back in 1995 (Figure 4).

With Dobrieva's second departure came a period of further consolidating and arranging of the data. In some cases, where Jacobson had been unable to fully understand Dobrieva's Russian or Naukan explanations, he had had her just write out the explanation in Russian, believing that it would be an easy matter to have them translated into English later. For this task we hired a talented Russian speaker, Tatiana Sorokina, from Kazakhstan who was living in Fairbanks then. Despite her best efforts we had to guess a lot more than we would have wished since Dobrieva had used specialized Russian words, or Russian words in special ways, for matters specific to Siberia.



Figure 3. Left to right: Naukan ladies Nina Enmenkau, Nadezhda Sudakova (who much later, as a resident of Nome, was instrumental in sending the Naukan dictionary copies to Chukotka), and Valentina Sirikova-Kagaaq with linguist Evgeniy Golovko in the archive/library of the Alaska Native Language Center Fairbanks in 1990, well before work on the dictionary actually began. Photo: Steven Jacobson.



Figure 4. Left to right: Elizaveta Dobrieva, Steven Jacobson and Michael Krauss working on the Naukan dictionary in Fairbanks in 1999. Photo: Tom Alton.

Eventually it all came together: introductions and "how to use this dictionary" explanatory sections, the main part of the work which consists of Naukan nouns, particles and verb bases, a section of highly questionable words, a section of unverified (but certainly possible) words given in older sources, a section of postbases and enclitics, Krauss's placenames section complete with keyed maps, and, of course indices to help one find Naukan words starting from English or Russian.

The parallel volume format of the Naukan dictionary

The computer database format was invaluable in enabling ANLC to publish this dictionary in two parallel volumes. One lists Naukan words in Latin letters, translating them to English, and has an English to Naukan index. The other lists Naukan words in modified Cyrillic, translating them to Russian, and has a Russian to Naukan index (Figure 5) Each volume has introductions and explanations in English or Russian as appropriate. The utility of the Russian volume for Naukan people and other dictionary users in Chukotka and European Russia is obvious, and the English volume should be of use to those linguists studying Eskimo for whom the Russian language might pose difficulties. Also, ANLC felt a responsibility to Alaskan Eskimos, particularly St. Lawrence Islanders, for whom Naukan is the closest Eskimo language to their own, who might well want to use this dictionary but who likely would know little Russian.

Distribution of the Naukan dictionary to the Naukan people

ANLC published the Naukan dictionary volumes in May 2004 (see Dobrieva *et al.* 2004; Golovko *et al.* 2004). The initial press run for the English volume was 60 copies, and for the Russian volume 175 copies. Some copies of the Russian volume were sent to scientific and pedagogical institutes in St. Petersburg, Moscow and Chukotka, a few were kept by ANLC, but most were sent to Lavrentiya and other places in Chukotka, where the majority of Naukan speakers and their descendants reside. The idea, of course, was that this Naukan dictionary project should contribute as much as possible to the perpetuation of the language among the Naukan people.

The boxes of Naukan dictionaries were sent from Alaska to Chukotka with the help of Nadezhda Sudakova now of Nome, one of two Naukan speakers who have recently moved to Alaska, and her husband, Victor Goldsbury. He is the very person through whom, over a decade earlier, ANLC had obtained the Teplilek-Leonova wordlist that one can consider the beginning of the Center's Naukan dictionary project!

Implications for a future Siberian (Chaplinski/St. Lawrence Is.) Yupik dictionary

Using a standard or "practical" American (Latin-letter) orthography in the English volume for a language such as Naukan that has no speakers who themselves use or know this orthography has always troubled us. We considered using a technical

pikna
 (pikna)
 (пикнья)
*that above; that back from the
 sea; that to the north*
 restricted demonstrative pronoun;
 pl: pikegkut; cf. pikani
 PE piy- 'up above' (res.)

pikterualaq
 (piktəʒualaq)
 (пиктырōлақ)
*phonograph; gramophone;
 victrola*
 from English 'victrola'

pikute-
 (pikute-)
 (пикуты-)
to be related
 < pi -ke- -(u)te-

пикнья
 (pikna)
 тот выше говорящего; на
 возвышении; в стороне от моря;
 на севере
 —
 ограниченное указательное
 местоимение; множ.: пикыхкут;
 ср. пикани
 PE piy- 'up above' (res.)

пиктырōлақ
 (pikterualaq)
 патефон; граммафон
 —
 от английского 'victrola'
 патефон, граммафон

пикуты-
 (pikute-)
 —
 состоять в родстве
 < пи -кы- -тулы-

Figure 5. On the left is a column of sample entries from the English volume of the Naukan dictionary. The Naukan word is given in the Latin-letter orthography as used in St. Lawrence Is., under it is a phonetic transcription, then the word in Cyrillic, then the English translation, and at the bottom of the entry is the etymology of the word, that is, the proto-Eskimo for that word, or the derivation from other dictionary words and suffixes, or the loan source word in the case of borrowings from English, Chukchi, Russian, etc. On the right are the parallel entries from the Russian volume. A phonetic transcription is not given since the Cyrillic spelling is quite close to the phonetic realization of the word.

phonetic alphabet such as that of the *Comparative Eskimo Dictionary*, and indeed it is used, but only in an explanatory way and not for listing or alphabetizing the entries. However, the Naukan dictionary's use by St. Lawrence Islanders is important, and perhaps even more important is that this Naukan dictionary can serve as model for a future dictionary of (Central) Siberian Yupik (both Ungaziq-Sirenik [*i.e.*, Chaplinsky] and St. Lawrence Island) itself to be published in two parallel volumes. Such a dictionary will incorporate all the material in the Russian Siberian Yupik dictionary (Rubtsova 1971), which is written in modified Cyrillic with translations into Russian, and in the American dictionary (Badten *et al.* 1987), which is written in the standard Latin-letter orthography of St. Lawrence Island with translations into English.

There were many problems in getting our particular database to alphabetize Cyrillic, and especially the Cyrillic modified with diacritic subscript hooks that is used for writing Eskimo languages in Russia. Our procedure for alphabetizing for the Naukan dictionary is carefully written up in the project notes and can be used in making the new Siberian Yupik dictionary.

Another problem will be vowel length. In Siberian Yupik, and somewhat less so in Naukan, it is often hard to distinguish vowels that are underlyingly long and those that are long due to prosody. It is so hard even for those who know the language that the distinction has largely disappeared in the speech of Siberian Yupik speakers under 50 years of age. Still, both the standard Cyrillic writing system for Siberian Yupik and the standard Latin-letter writing system can show the distinction. One comes to appreciate the Cyrillic system, where the distinction is made with a macron, and these macrons are routinely omitted except in dictionaries and grammar books, an omission which is never a problem for speakers of the language who, in their speech, very likely do not differentiate vowel lengths from the two different sources anyway. It is somewhat harder with the American orthography. It would certainly be odd to see all vowels written only single in a book for reading, but then to have certain of these vowels double in a dictionary or grammar, which would thereby be rendered rather tricky to use. In fact, people on St. Lawrence Island do want to continue using the device of doubling vowels to show underlying length even if spelling then sometimes entails repeatedly consulting the elders, relying on a dictionary, and/or prying a word apart grammatically—and probably making a fair number of mistakes along the way. A related problem arose in editing Badten *et al.* (1987), since, under inflection, “short” Siberian Yupik words will often change the length of their first vowels. Jacobson, the editor, handled that problem by listing entries together if they differ only in the question of whether the vowel of the first syllable is single or double. We have worked out a way to do this with the data-base program and even to go one step further, to disregard the question of single vs. double vowel for every syllable of the word, not just the first, in alphabetizing, and the procedure is again written up in the Naukan project notes.

There is much, much editing still to be done on the new Siberian Yupik dictionary. One of the biggest problems is how to determine the exact meaning and usage of the many Siberian Yupik particle (adverbial, conjunctive, exclamatory) words that come from Chukchi. Native speakers often do not see this as a problem; it is straightforward

to them (at least concerning the ones that they themselves use, and fewer are used on St. Lawrence Island than in Chukotka). However, except in a few cases, the translations we get simply do not enable those who are not native speakers to use the words in question correctly. One strongly suspects that their usage depends on a considerable but as yet not barely investigated interplay with certain verbal postbases and/or enclitics. Particles should also be viewed in a larger context than the single sentences in which they occur. Resolving this kind of question will entail examining many examples of actual usages from texts of various kinds and from various sources. There are also non-particle words derived from Chukchi which are far less common in St. Lawrence Island speech than in Chukotkan, and will require the help of Siberian Yupik elders in Chukotka to elucidate. Very important—and necessary for a comprehensive dictionary of the language—would be the inclusion of those words not in Rubtsova (1971) or Badten *et al.* (1987) which may be found in the extensive lexical files for (Central) Siberian Yupik of Emel'yanova, which, like her files for Naukan, are housed in St. Petersburg. Another kind of challenge is just keeping up with the specialized lexicons being produced for Siberian Yupik. It sometimes seems that there are almost as many of these as for Central (Alaskan) Yup'ik with 10 times as many speakers. No sooner had Badten *et al.* (1987) been published, than ANLC received an extensive "curriculum manual," actually a specialized dictionary (with glosses in Siberian Yupik) by Walunga (1987). Such works, including most recently the lexicon of ice terms by Oozeva *et al.* (2004), continue to appear. Just keeping up with these will be a challenge.

However, groundwork is indeed in place for the new dictionary: a database has been set up from Badten *et al.* (1987). Most if not all the items in Rubtsova 1971 that were not included in Badten *et al.* (1987) have now been added, except for unassimilated loans from Russian and transparent derivative words. Many other additions and corrections have been made. The dual parallel volume format of the Naukan dictionary points the way toward a final dictionary design. When the new Siberian Yupik dictionary is finished, undoubtedly the good offices of people in Nome and St. Lawrence Island, as well as their counterparts in Siberia, can be relied upon to aid in that dictionary's distribution, as has been the case with the Naukan dictionary.

Although much larger in population than Naukan, the Siberian Yupik people constitute a tiny and linguistically very vulnerable population. The expectation that the end of the Cold War would allow the Siberian Yupik population to reunite culturally has been tempered by the realization that the two sides are rapidly losing their common tongue. Young people on the Chukotkan side speak little or no Siberian Yupik, only Russian, while on the American side school children increasingly speak little Siberian Yupik, only English. Even at this late hour, parallel Siberian Yupik dictionary volumes, modeled after the Naukan volumes, may help to reinvigorate the language. The language should serve as a bridge linking the two halves of a people that had been united across the Bering Strait for a thousand years but that has been divided in the last few decades only by a history not of their own making. This consideration is, of course, in addition to the undoubted scientific importance of a new, comprehensive, Siberian Yupik dictionary.

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